**Issue Statement**

How can the Government of Canada reduce barriers to public health for racialized Canadians?

**Background**

* Key social determinants of public health include access to stable employment, education, housing, food security, professional networks, health services, and identity (i.e. gender, race, disability, Aboriginal status).
* Race-based data enable greater awareness of health inequities experienced by racialized communities and visible minorities.
* For the first time, Statistics Canada released Labour Force Survey (LFS) data that demonstrated disproportionately high unemployment rates for several visible minority groups despite large gains in employment.
* According to Statistics Canada, visible minority Canadians are persons who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour, and non-Aboriginal people.
* The July 2020 LFS was the first survey released at the federal level that included data detailing not only employment and unemployment trends for recent immigrants, but also for diverse groups of Canadians such as South Asian, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Arab, and Black Canadians.
* Although the LFS data for the months of August and September displayed some information on employment and unemployment trends for certain diverse groups (i.e. Black and Filipino Canadians), there was a noticeable lack of inclusion of data on other racialized groups in comparison to the July 2020 LFS; and the December 2020 LFS only disclosed unemployment data for South Asian, East Asian, and Latin American.
* Statistics Canada provided an analysis in the July 2020 LFS which explained that negative impacts from COVID-19 lockdowns such as unemployment, are disproportionately experienced by different populations possibly due to a large concentration of racialized Canadians within industries hardest hit by the economic shutdowns such as restaurants (Statistics Canada, 2020).

**Key Considerations**

*New information on labour market conditions for diverse groups of Canadians was disclosed through the July 2020 Labour Force Survey (LFS) which was the first LFS to collect and use race-based data to address gaps in the understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on population groups designated as visible minorities.*

* Statistics Canada developed an experimental method to integrate data from other sources so that population group characteristics could be added to the information collected through direct interviews prior to July (Statistics Canada, 2020).
* The findings identified that South Asian and Chinese Canadians experienced the largest COVID-related increases in unemployment rate among other visible minority groups captured by the July 2020 LFS such as, Filipino and Black Canadians.
* The LFS reported that South Asian Canadians experienced +9.1 percentage points and +8.4 percentage points for Chinese Canadians from July 2019 to July 2020. The historically high unemployment rate for visible minority groups may be attributable to their greater concentration as workers in some of the industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 shutdowns.
* Unemployment rate for Southeast Asian Canadians was 16.5%, 17.3% for Arab Canadians, 16.0% for Latin American groups, and the unemployment rate for those who were not a member of a population group designated as a visible minority and who did not identify as Aboriginal was 9.3%.
* Statistics Canada also reported that the lower increase in the unemployment rate among Black Canadians (+6.3 percentage points; total: 16.8%) and Filipino Canadians (+6.2 percentage points; total: 13.2%) could be attributable to their large contribution to the health care and social assistance industry which may explain their lower unemployment rate during the COVID-19 pandemic.
* Nearly one-quarter (23.6%) of employed Filipino Canadians and one-fifth (20.3%) of employed Black Canadians worked in health care and social assistance industry

*The last Census data delivered in 2016 by Statistics Canada consisted of limited race-based employment and unemployment projections which raised concerns about disproportionate sampling methods. Unemployment trends for racialized groups may be underplayed by the report as no ethnic groups were represented with sample sizes that matched non-visible minorities.*

* The Census captured 22,569,145 non-visible minorities and 28,643,015 visible minorities, which also reported that unemployment projections for total visible minorities amounted to +9.2 and +7.3 for non-visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2016).
* The organization of the Census data, namely the ‘visible minority’ variable, quantitatively subsumed many racial and ethnic backgrounds such as, Korean, South Asian, Chinese, Black, Latin American, and Arab.
* None of the sample sizes for each visible minority group were proportionally fit to the total sample of non-visible minorities.

*Upstream Lab launched a study that utilizes distinctions-based framework known as S.P.A.R.K. (Screening for Poverty And Related social determinants and intervening to improve Knowledge of and links to resources) to enable greater understanding of the social determinants of health, to guide race-based data collection, and to support routine race-based data collection.*

* The study is expected to produce a multi-lingual national standard for socio-demographic data collection.
* Upstream Lab’s study has committed to implement guidelines for data collection, extraction, analysis, and use of data across electronic medical record, along with guidelines for engaging patients and communities (The Upstream Lab, 2018).
* A final objective of this study is to provide strong evidence from a national, cluster randomized control trial (RCT) on what is the most effective way to address poverty at the point-of-care, which will guide action on other social needs.

*As part of the province’s Anti-Racism Strategy, the Government of Ontario’s Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD) race data standards was developed to identify, monitor and eliminate systemic racism in the public sector.*

* The Ontario Government released a set of 6 principles that should be followed by organizations in interpreting and applying the standards such as Principle 6, which mandates organizations to collect and use data that are transparent, timely, and accessible (Government of Ontario, 2019).
* The ARD also listed a set of 7 standards for public sector organizations (PSOs). A key standard for PSOs’ data collection approach is to support and promote anti-racism organization change (Standard 6), which includes using information to better understand racial inequities, inform evidence-based decisions to remove systemic barriers, and advance racial equity (Government of Ontario, 2019).

*The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative (CCPA), a leading organization that advocates for transparent data on racial injustices manifested within Canada’s labour market, released a report* *in 2019 called, ‘Colour Coded Income Inequality*,’ *which provided an analysis that highlighted key disparities in economic opportunities on the basis of gender and race* (Block, Galabuzi, & Tranjan, 2019).

* One of the findings indicated that racialized men and women held an unemployment rate of 8.8% and 9.6%, respectively; while non-racialized men and women held unemployment rates of 8.2% and 6.4%, respectively (CCPA, 2019).
* The CCPA has operated several projects that focused primarily on addressing issues related to racism, accurate and ongoing race-based data collection, and social justice.

**Analysis and Recommendation**

*1. Option One:* The Government of Canada provides financial contributions to the Upstream Lab’s *SPARK* study for the purposes of advancing routine race-based and ethnicity-focused data collection.

* **Implementation**: The Department of Finance and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPCC) should match financial contributions delivered by the Government of Ontario and commit to sourcing the Upstream Lab’s SPARK project on a bi-monthly basis, subject to negotiable circumstances.
* **Projection**: Contributions made to the SPARK study would enhance race-based data procurement and add to valuable existing literature regarding health inequities for racialized Canadians. The Government of Canada is equipped with strong capacity to monitor the progress being made by SPARK. In the coming years, SPARK’s contribution to databanks could reflect extensive race-based trends and improve transparency with respect to measuring racism in the labour force.
* **Analysis**: The Department of Finance and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPCC) are key institutions that would best enable financial contributions to the SPARK project. The strengths behind involving the OPCC in this option not only includes increased probability that the Government of Canada can incorporate SPARK’s findings within federal databanks, but also provide legislative protection to Upstream Lab.

*2. Option Two:* The Government of Canada’s statisticians engage in collaborative data collection with the CCPA to develop an open-source platform that is purposed with measuring of racial health inequities and racism in the labour force.

* **Implementation**: Statistical findings from the CCPA and the Government of Canada is assessed collaboratively through an arms-length partnership.
* **Projection**: Working in partnership with a credible research institute to collect, measure, and display complex race-based data could reduce time and increase efficiency with respect to delivering transparent information to the public. Throughout this partnership, the CCPA could provide new incentives for the Government of Canada to foster new frameworks that enhance accessibility, availability, and applicability of race-based data.
* **Analysis**: The CCPA is a renown independent and non-partisan research institute that is primarily concerned with issues of social, economic and environmental justice. Through a horizontal relationship, the unique methods utilized by each institution, along with the quality and depth of research from both CCPA divisions and the Government of Canada may produce the most transparent and non-partisan statistical databank across the country. Although there are competing interests that could weaken the feasibility of this policy option, establishment of a shared objective to provide public, credible, and accurate statistical information could entail production of a resourceful partnership that revolutionizes the ways in which data collection is conducted (i.e. collection and disclosure of accurate race-based data).

*3. Option Three:* The Government of Canada introduces legislation enforcing the permanency, standardization, and ongoing collection of race-based data at the federal level that are measured proportionally to white (or Caucasian) study samples. \***Recommended Option**

* **Implementation**: Introduce standardized data collection and usage strategy that promotes anti-racism in organizational work culture. Standards can include modified mandates of the Ontario Government’s *Anti-Racism Data Standards*.
* **Projection**: Legislation mandates the importance of race-based data and could produce future incentives across industries and sectors to engage in routine race-based data collection and strategies allowing for self-identification.
* **Analysis & Reasons for Recommendation**: Canada advances existing commitments to multiculturalism through better data collection practices – that is, investing more political and economic resources to address systemic racism by way of enhancing awareness of racial discrimination in the labour force and unequal access to public health. This option is not only cost efficient as Statistics Canada was well equipped to conduct statistical analyses of race-based data between 2019 and 2020 in the absence of mandates, but also a significant step toward reducing social and economic barriers for racialized Canadians because race-based data enables all actors to measure experiences of racism.

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